

Commission Quashes WTO Referendum Drive

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Central Elections Commission on Friday ruled that Russians can't vote in a referendum on the country's future membership in the WTO, stating as one of the reasons that Russian is not the official language of the trade organization.

A group led by Konstantin Babkin, a co-owner of farm equipment companies in Russia and Canada, petitioned the authorities to allow the referendum in a last-ditch attempt to reverse the agreement between Russia and the WTO that envisages Russia's accession by the end of the summer. The group said the membership would damage domestic producers by inviting unfair competition.

The Central Elections Commission said the referendum would require people to study the accession terms that include at least 23,150 trade and tariff obligations by the country — all in English, French and Spanish, which are the official WTO languages. That prevents Russians from making an informed decision, the commission said in a statement.

Another reason to scuttle the referendum is that international agreements are in the exclusive remit of the federal government, the commission said.

The referendum's organizers said they would take the matter to the Supreme Court.

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